



Natural Heritage &  
Endangered Species  
Program

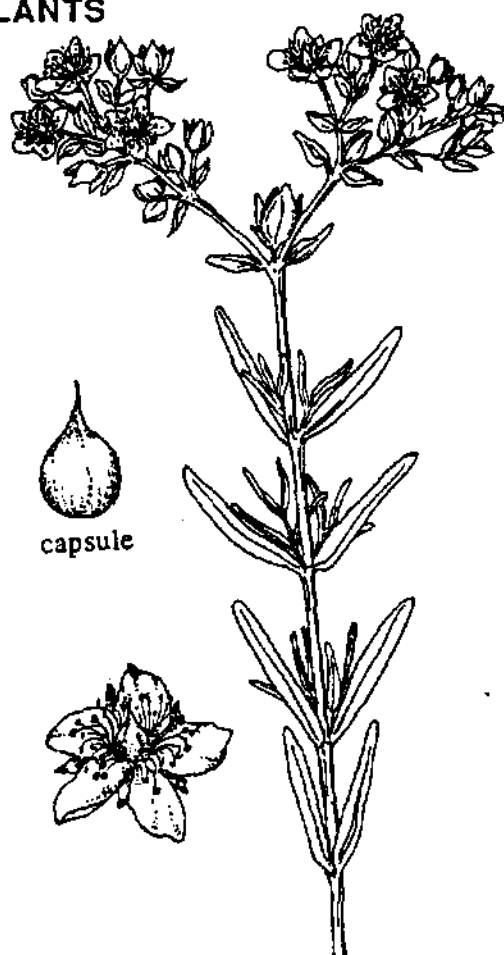
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife  
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MASSACHUSETTS THREATENED PLANTS

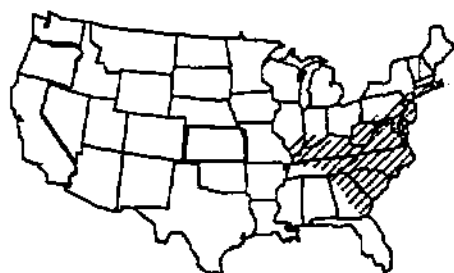
Creeping St. John's-wort  
(*Hypericum adpressum* Barton)

Description

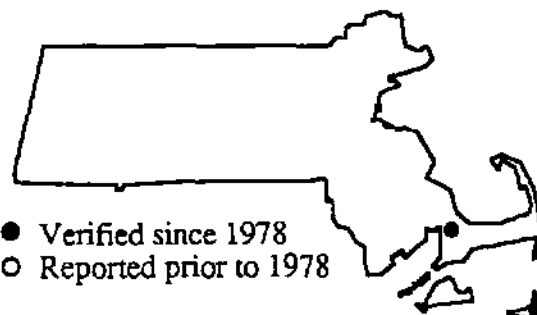
Creeping St. John's-wort is a stoloniferous (spreading by runners) herbaceous perennial belonging to the St. John's-wort family. It produces erect, sparsely branched stems 30-80 (12-30 in.) tall which are terminated by open heads (cymes) of many bright yellow flowers. Each flower is 1.5-2 cm (.6-.8 in.) wide with 5 petals surrounding a prominent cluster of 20-100 yellow stamens. The glossy green leaves are variably linear to oblong-elliptic, 3-6 cm (1.2-2.4 in.) long, tapered at both ends, and distinguished by rolled-under (revolute) margins. They are arranged in whorls of 2 or 3 leaves which often support several bundles of smaller leaves. The stem bases have a tendency to become thickened and spongy when the plants are submerged for extended periods. The fruit is an oval- or globe-shaped capsule with a long, narrow tip. Flowering occurs from late July to early September.



F. S. Mathews. Plate 37 Rhodora 4, 1902.



Range of Creeping St. John's-wort



Distribution in Massachusetts by Town

### Similar Species

Two related species closely resemble Creeping St. John's-wort. Greater St. John's-wort (H. majus) differs by its smaller flowers, fewer stamens, and a narrower capsule. Pale St. John's-wort (H. ellipticum) has smaller, more elliptical leaves without revolute margins. Also sharing the same habitats are the Narrow-leaved, Marsh, and Northern St. John's-worts, (Hypericum canadense, H. virginicum, and H. boreale). Each differs sufficiently from Creeping St. John's-wort to easily distinguish it without detailed examination.

### Range

Creeping St. John's-wort is primarily a southern and midwestern species that reaches its northernmost range limit in Massachusetts. It is locally distributed from eastern Massachusetts south along the coastal plain to Georgia, and inland to Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois. It is considered a rare species in every state where it is known to occur.

### Habitat in Massachusetts

In Massachusetts Creeping St. John's-wort is a Coastal Plain species, primarily found on the shores of freshwater ponds and "pondlets" that are permanent bodies of water but which undergo pronounced seasonal fluctuations in water level. It also occurs in two other atypical habitats, a seasonally wet dirt road near a shrubby wetland, and at the edge of a cranberry bog. These sites are open, relatively flat, and free of tree and shrub competition. Composed of nutrient poor, sandy-peaty soils, they are subject to intervals of drought alternating with flooding and saturation. Creeping St. John's-wort has adapted to these stresses by synchronizing its growth and flowering periods with the changing water levels. The predominant vegetation of grasses, sedges and herbs includes common shore species such as: Slender-leaved Goldenrod (Solidago tenuifolia), Meadow Beauty (Rhexia virginianum), Beak-rush (Rhynchospora capitellata), and several common rushes (Juncus). In favorable situations Creeping St. John's-wort may be a dominant species, growing in large stands of several hundred or more plants. In spite of this, it is unpredictable in its occurrence, and absent from much apparently suitable habitat, indicating that other unknown factors must influence its distribution.

### Population Status

Creeping St. John's-wort is presently listed as Endangered by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Currently (since 1978) it has been verified at 9 sites in this state (all but one are on Nantucket). Historically it was known from 3 additional sites which no longer support this species. Habitat succession is responsible for at least one population loss, but its absence from other sites is not yet understood. The potential deterioration of Massachusetts Coastal Plain ponds by development, recreational use and nutrient input threatens what remains of Creeping St. John's-wort's principle habitat. Presently only one site requires management intervention to protect its population. Other sites are regularly monitored and appear to be thriving.